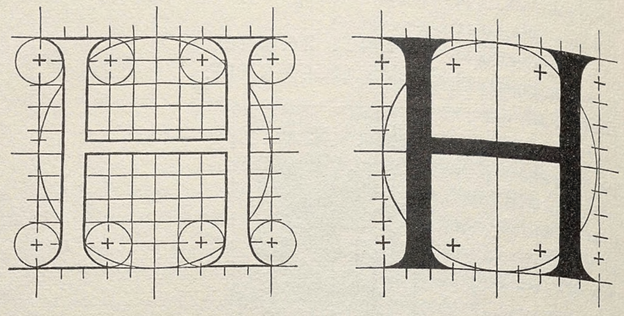

* *The original text has* I—*plainly a misprint.*

THE figure here designed & drawn, of an H* with eight centres, is ten units square—that is to say, as broad as it is high. The Grammarians—and especially Priscian in his first book, wherein he treats *De literarum potestate*—say that it is not a letter, but the sign and symbol to show when some vowel, or one of the four consonants C, P, R, T, should be pronounced thickly and in a full voice from the depths of the stomach. Priscian says: H, *autem aspirationis est nota, et nihil aliud habet literæ, nisi figuram, et quod in usu scribitur inter alias literas.*† That is to say, 'H is the symbol of the breathing, and has nothing else pertaining to a letter save the figure of one and [the fact] that by custom it is written among the other letters.'

† I, III, 8. *In recent texts of Priscian, this passage reads quite differently.*

H Has so little effect upon the vowels that, if it be taken away, the sound will not be lessened; but it is not so with the four consonants, C, P, R, T. Examples of the vowels: *Erennius, Oratius.* Example of the consonants: *Cremes* for *Chremes.* And for this reason, as Priscian says in the passage quoted, the Greeks had separate characters for these said consonants when aspirated: for *Th,* they had Θ; for *Ph,* Φ; for *Ch,* X. The *Rho* is not changed in shape, but it takes a half-cross above it in capitals, and a curved line in small letters, which stands for the mark of breathing, as one can plainly see in the printings of the late excellent printer Aldus, whom God assoil.

AUlus Gellius in the third chapter of the Second Book of his *Noctes Atticæ,* says that H was inserted by the ancient writers in certain

words to give them a firmer and stronger sound, when he says: H *litera, siue illam spiritum magis quam literam dici oportet, inserebant eam veteres nostri plerisque vocibus verborum firmandis roborandisque, vt sonus earum esset viridior vegetiorque. Atque id videntur fecisse studio et exemplo linguæ Atticæ. Satis notum est Attiquos* ιχθυν ηϱον. *Multa itidem alia citra morem gentium Græciæ cæterarum inspirantis primæ literæ dixisse, sic lachrymas, sic specbulum, sic ahenum, sic vehemens, sic inchoare, sic helluari, sic hallucinari, sic honera, sic honustum dixerunt. In his verbis omnibus literæ seu spiritus istius nulla ratio visa est, nisi vt firmitas et vigor vocis quasi quibusdam neruis additis intenderetur.** That is to say: 'The letter H—or if it be more fitting to say so, the vocal breath—was inserted in many words by the ancient Romans to fortify and strengthen them, to the end that their sound should be firmer and lustier. These same ancients did this in imitation of the Athenians, in whose speech ιχθυν, ηϱον and many other like words were aspirated, contrary to the custom of the other nations of Greece. Thus were aspirated *lachrymæ, specbulum, ahenum, vehemens, inchoare, hallucinari, honera,* and *honustum.* In all these words, there seems to be no reason for the breathing, unless it be to give them firmness and strength, as if they were reinforced by the nerves.'

* *Noctes Atticæ,* II, III, *ad init. The original has 'H. litteram' for 'H. litera,' and 'sepulcrum' for 'specbulum.'*

THE Romans represented the symbol of breathing in the exact form and shape of a Greek vowel called *Ita*—H. The Greeks made of their said vowel *Ita* two silent symbols like accents—to show that a vowel beginning a word, and the consonant *Rho,* also when beginning a word or doubled in the making of a noun or a verb, should be aspirated, or not. For by cutting the said vowel *Ita* through the middle into two perpendicular parts, the first part serves to show that the vowel, or the said consonant *Rho,* is aspirated, and the other part to show that the said vowel, or Rho, is not aspirated. The *Ita* is divided thus, ⊦⊣, and its parts are placed over capital letters, as I have said, over vowels or *Rho* at the beginning of a word, and over *Rho* when it is doubled by joining two words or otherwise.

THE resemblance of this Latin aspirate and the Greek vowel *Ita* is the reason why so many ignorant moderns, ignorant of the Greek language, have erred, & err every day, in the spelling—or in the proper writing—of those two supreme and precious names, IESVS and CHRISTVS. For when writing them as abbreviations, they write IHESVS,† with a Latin breathing, and XPΣ, with a Latin X and P;

†*He means, evidently,* I.H.S.[52]